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The Influenza Pandemic of 1918

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EPIDEMIC INFLUENZA AND THE UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

Better than volumes of reasoned arguments, the present epidemic of "Spanish" influenza has shown in concrete form how important it is to have attached to the United States Public Health Service a reserve organization which can be mobilized in times of emergency.

With the widespread occurrence of influenza in the vicinity of Boston, and the unmistakable signs of its beginning elsewhere, urgent calls were addressed to the United States Public Health Service to furnish medical and nursing relief to stricken communities. All available regular officers were detailed to the stricken communities, but the number available for such detail was insignificant compared to the urgent need occasioned by the epidemic. Moreover, the bureau had no nurses available for service in epidemic.

In this emergency the Surgeon General called upon the Volunteer Medical Service Corps, the Red Cross, the medical and nursing professions as a whole, and on the general public for personnel to help combat the epidemic. At the same time Congress was appealed to for a special appropriation to meet the expenditure required by the emergency. The necessary funds were promptly voted in the following authorization:

Resolved, That to enable the Public Health Service to combat and suppress 'Spanish influenza' and other communicable diseases by aiding State and local boards of health, or otherwise, including pay and allowances of medical and sanitary personnel, medical and hospital supplies, printing, clerical services, and

rent in the District of Columbia and elsewhere, transportation, freight, and such other expenses as may be necessary, there is appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, \$1,000,000, to be available until June thirtieth, nineteen hundred and nineteen.

"SEC. 2. That the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Treasury are authorized and directed, respectively, to utilize jointly the personnel and facilities of the Medical Department of the Army, the Medical Department of the Navy, and the Public Health Service, so far as possible, in aiding to combat and suppress the said diseases.

"Approved, October 1, 1918."

In response to the request for physicians available for duty in the Public Health Service the Volunteer Medical Service Corps compiled a list of over 1,000 names classified by States. Appointments were offered by telegraph to these physicians by the Public Health Service, and within 48 hours groups of physicians were on their way to some of the stricken communities in New England, where the epidemic at that time raged most severely. Soon after similar medical units were sent to New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and to Phoenix, Ariz.

The problem of supplying nurses was much more difficult, for it was found almost impossible to discover nurses or trained attendants who were not already extremely busy on urgent medical work. Nevertheless, a limited number of nurses and trained attendants was secured by the American Red Cross and mobilized for emergency service in the communities most severely affected. In addition to this the attention of local communities was called to the valuable nursing work which could be rendered by intelligent volunteer workers, such as school teachers, especially when they are directed by trained graduate nurses. In many communities the organization of this group of nursing personnel has done much to relieve the serious emergency caused by the lack of trained nurses.

It was made clear from the outset that the United States Public Health Service desired to aid and not supplant State and local health authorities in their work. Accordingly instructions were issued that all requests for medical, nursing, or other emergency aid in dealing with the epidemic should come to the United States Public Health Service only through the State health officer. Moreover, as soon as possible all this epidemic work was organized on State lines, with a representative of the United States Public Health Service detailed to each State to secure the best possible organization and coordination of health activities of the service; in others the executive of the State board of health has been given appointment in the United States Public Health Service as field director.

With the extension of the epidemic and the increasing demands made on the Public Health Service, welcome aid in securing physicians was furnished by the American Medical Association and by medical journals and newspapers which published appeals to physicians to offer their services. As a result the Public Health Service now (Oct. 22) has over 600 physicians and 50 miscellaneous employees (nurses, clerks, stenographers, etc.) on duty in various States. This does not include the nurses and nurses' aides serving under the Red Cross.

While the activities of the doctors and nurses working under the Public Health Service are generally limited to those ordinarily regarded as preventive health measures, emergency conditions in some communities have been such that much medical relief work has had to be undertaken. This was the case, for example, in several communities where the few practicing physicians were themselves stricken and where the people were in urgent need of medical attention.

While the epidemic is subsiding along the Atlantic seaboard, it appears to be increasing in prevalence in the Central States. Physicians and nurses are therefore still needed. The latter should apply to their local Red Cross chapter,



which will attend to their enrollment and assignment to duty. Physicians who are ready to undertake service in the United States Public Health Service should communicate directly with the bureau representative in their respective States. Address United States Public Health officer in charge, care of State board of health.

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SURE CURES FOR INFLUENZA

The present epidemic has given rise to the publication of numerous "sure cures" and methods more or less plausible to the lay mind. The advocates of some of these have addressed long communications to Secretary McAdoo, to Surg. Gen. Blue, to the War Department, or other Government agencies. Hundreds of them have written to editors of newspapers. In general the suggestions fall into several groups.

First comes the individual who has a specific remedy, the formula of which he is ready to give to the world for a price. One such writer reminds the Surgeon General of the million dollars that Congress has appropriated for combating influenza, and offers to sell his secret for "a reasonable sum."

Next comes the person with the pseudoscientific treatment, sometimes "isotonic sea water," sometimes "ozono therapy," and again "harmonic vibrations." One such writer, well known to the New York health authorities, addressed the Surgeon General from his present residence, the State Hospital for the Insane.

Still another type is the individual who gives freely of his advice so that humanity may be spared from the pestilence. Such a one writes: "Sprinkle a little sulphur in each shoe every morning; this was given to the people of Atlanta by a doctor of forty-odd years of practice. He also used it when waiting on yellow fever years ago." Another advises people to add "10 cents worth of asafetida to half a pint of brandy, and give a teaspoonful every two or three hours. I gave my baby one-fourth teaspoonful with good results."

One writer, who says he lives "at the jumping off place in western California," has perfected a patent medicine which will "knock out germs and remove the real cause of sickness. I got it by combining wonderful essential oils that will penetrate the hardest wood that grows the compound while it is not a poison it will penetrate any and all kinds of germs or insects and dry or burn it up in a minute." This wonderful remedy [name deleted by censor] sells for \$1 per bottle.

One writer frankly advises the use of a patent medicine formerly widely advertised as a cure for consumption, but now compelled by the Government to be labeled simply a remedy for coughs and colds.

A physician writing from Missouri offers "to furnish the remedy for the nominal price of \$4.50 for each patient, or will take a surgeon major's commission and pay," and give his services to the Army medical department. He has tested his remedy "on the most Desperate caises."

A patriot advises the use of a patent medicine made in Detroit. Used in a case recently, it was observed "that within 30 minutes after applying the medicine the patient was relieved of all pain in the lungs and immediately was well and about."

From Portsmouth, Va., comes a letter which calls attention to the real cause of the epidemic—namely, "Descreation of God's Sabbath which he said Keep Holy." Then follow a number of quotations from the Bible to support the writer's contention that the epidemic was sent by the Almighty to punish the world for its sinfulness.

Comes also the mental scientist who regards the epidemic as engendered by

